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# Transition in Suffolk



**A Good Life for 8 Young People in Suffolk**

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**January 2011**

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## **Section 1**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This research was commissioned by Suffolk County Council in late 2010, and the main fieldwork was completed in the Spring of 2011. The study investigated the transition journey from school to adult life for eight young people with special educational needs from Suffolk. It developed an in-depth insight into their aspirations and the way they see their lives. It also investigated how they were supported to transition from school to adult life and discussed the issues they raised with experts in Suffolk. Indicative financial costs regarding some of the support provided to the young people were also gathered.

This report will use the term young people when discussing the young people with special educational needs involved in this research.

This report is presented in four sections:

- Section 1: Provides an introduction to recent research around transition. The section goes on to describe the methods utilised in the present study to investigate the eight young people's transition and the wider issues raised in relation transition in Suffolk.
- Section 2: Presents the key themes developed from the eight case studies.
- Section 3: Presents four representative scenarios of transitions in Suffolk (developed from the eight young people's case studies) and presents some of the related costs. This section relates the research to the literature on transition.
- Section 4: Summarises the findings and presents recommendations for future transition work in Suffolk.

### **1.2 Transition**

In recent years, the importance of transition from school to adulthood for young people with special educational needs and young disabled adults has been highlighted in a number of government documents including: Transition: Moving on Well (Department of Health 2008), the National Service Framework (NSF) for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (2004), Improving the Life Chances of Disabled people (Cabinet Office - Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005), Valuing People Now (2009) and Progression through Partnership (Department of Education, 2007). All of these documents call for the development of better co-ordinated services and more positive outcomes for young people with special educational needs and young disabled people.

A large amount of development work has taken place to improve the transition process for young people with special educational needs and young disabled people. Government funded projects such as the Transition Support Programme (<http://www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk/>) including the Transition Information Network (<http://www.transitioninforonetwork.org.uk/home1.aspx>) as well as the Getting a Life Project

(Gitsham et al 2011, <http://www.gettingalife.org.uk/>) have developed and shared positive practice. These projects have had a particular emphasis on enabling these young adults to enter employment.

Employment is widely recognised as key to social inclusion and positive life outcomes for young disabled people as well as an unfulfilled aspiration for many of these young people who want an ordinary life (Burchardt, 2005; ODI, 2008; Gitsham et al, 2011; Sayce Report, 2011; Sloper et al, 2011). The recent Government SEN consultation 'Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability' states that by 2015 all disabled young people will have access to better quality vocational and work-related learning options and good opportunities to get and keep a job (Department for Education, 2011).

### **1.3 Good practice during transition**

The Sayce Report (2011), which discussed appropriate support to enable employment for disabled people, reported that Education, Health and Social care systems should help raise young people and their families' aspirations regarding work and prepare young people to enter and retain employment. Personalisation of services, including the use of personalised budgets which can be used for employment support (DoH, 2010), and enabling young people to experience the world of work through opportunities such as supported work experience or supported employment are said to be key to this aim (Cowen et al 2010; Kaehne et al, 2011).

Transmap (undated) identified core underlying principles in ensuring that transition works appropriately and results in a positive life for young people. These principles include:

- Comprehensive multi-agency engagement.
- The full participation of young people and their families.
- The provision of high quality information.
- Effective transition planning.
- An array of opportunities for living life (Transmap, page 4).

Ofsted (2011) also recommended:

- The provision of adequately trained and resourced personal advisors.
- Full involvement by Social Services in all stages of the young people's transition.
- The use of a mentor to maintain contact with young person at all stages up to 25.
- Impartial advice and guidance and decision making about provision based on objective criteria and identified needs.
- Improving capacity for learners with the most profound and complex needs.

Gitsham et al (2011) added that it is essential to develop a person centred plan early, to expect more of young people and to ensure that everybody involved in transition planning understands the benefit of paid employment. Working towards employment can then be facilitated through personalised curricula, meaningful work experience, the use of personal budgets and all individuals and agencies involved working together for change. Sloper et al (2011) also indicated that transition workers should remain alongside young people and their families. Workers should set up the adult care package and negotiate the funding for it and support the young person until they were settled in adult services.

However, research over many years has shown that this type of positive practice, which has been recommended over many years, is not consistent across the UK. The research indicates that transition is often characterised by uncertainty, inconsistent approaches to transition planning and a lack of meaningful choice about post-education options (Morris, 1999; O’Sullivan, 2000; Heslop et al, 2002; Tarleton 2004, Hudson, 2006). Morris’s (2002) summary of the issues facing young people and their families is strikingly similar to the following list based on research published in 2010 and 2011:

- Young people move directly into college courses from school without the opportunity to consider employment (Gitsham et al, 2011).
- Transitions plans look at the next college course or direct destination rather than looking holistically at what young people want to do with their lives. These plans often lead to a five day a week college placement or day service rather than employment and ignore high levels of unmet need in other areas of their lives (Beyer et al, 2008; Gitsham et al, 2011; Sloper et al, 2010).
- Few young people with special educational needs or disabilities complete programmes of learning in post 16 settings which develop greater independence, lead to further study, supported or open employment or provide skills for independent living (Ofsted, 2011).
- Low expectations and lack of aspirations lead to the presumption that employment is neither positive nor possible for people with learning disabilities (Gitsham et al, 2011).
- Few people with individualised budgets are using these for employment support (Glendinning et al, 2008; Stockton and Cattermole, 2011).
- There is a lack of work experience available for young people (Jordan and Gitsham, 2010) and a lack of support, limited transport options and a lack of clear information about welfare benefits inhibits young people and their families considering employment options (Gitsham et al, 2011).
- Young people and their parents struggle to understand and work with the transition system:
  - There is no continuity between the separate systems of health, social care and school (DOE, 2011; Kaehne, 2010).
  - There is a lack of meaningful advice regarding funding and support after school (Gitsham et al, 2011).
  - The bureaucracy of transition planning system loses the voices of young person and their families despite systems often having espouse being person centred. Families and young people are treated as recipients, not partners in the planning process (Cowen et al, 2010, Gitsham et al, 2011).

## **1.4 Aims of the research**

This research aimed to:

- Understand how the young people with special educational needs, their parents and professionals were engaged in the transition journey in Suffolk.
- Investigate what they regard as a positive outcome for living a good life.
- Investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector decision making, funding and commissioning, in Suffolk, during the transition journey.



## 1.5 Methods

This section discusses the way the research was undertaken with the eight young people, their families and a professional who was involved in their transition. There were three stages to this research. These were:

- The case study stage of the research.
- An expert panel meeting.
- Consulting on the preliminary findings and collection of costs.

## 1.6 The Young people involved

Eight case studies of young people in Suffolk were developed with young people who had accessed various types of education after leaving school:

- Local FE provision in-county.
- An Improving Choices bespoke learning programme.
- Specialist, out-of-county, residential school placement.
- Other provision.

The research only included young people who were able to understand the nature of research and who could consent to taking part in it themselves. The commissioner's initial time frame for the research did not allow the inclusion of young people who may have difficulty in consenting to take part in the research (which would require approval by the Social Care Research Ethics Committee). The research was approved by the Suffolk County Council Research Governance Committee.

We are aware that this approach resulted in the research focusing on young people who could be described as 'more able' and who did not have profound or complex needs. One of the young people involved in the research did have considerable health needs which required ongoing support and monitoring. Three of the young adults included in the research were described as being on the autistic spectrum. Five males and three females were involved in the research. They were all in their mid to late twenties. The focus on more able young people, however, highlighted the issues of inclusion and fulfilling aspirations for young people who are less likely to have a large amount of support from services.

A 'purposive' sample was utilised. This means that young people were specifically selected to ensure that the two young people from each of the following groups: young people who had accessed local FE, an Improving Choices bespoke learning programme, specialist out-of-county residential placement and other provision were involved in the research. The young people invited to take part in the research were identified by Stephanie Graham (Lead Professional Children with Additional Needs) who also sent initial information about the research to the young people and their families and responded to any initial queries. The Lead Professional Children with Additional Needs also consulted the Suffolk Transitions Service (STS) as well as other local professionals who have been involved in transition planning in Suffolk to locate potential participants. Colleagues suggested young people who could be invited to take part in the research but they were not informed whether the young people had been invited to

participate. The Lead Professional Children with Additional Needs, however, was privy to the information about which young people had consented to take part in the research.

This report utilises ‘representative journeys’ developed from the young people’s accounts in order to protect their identities while enabling professionals to discuss the issues that had become apparent during the case study phase.

## **1.7 The case studies**

Each case study involved:

- Interviewing the young person and seeking their consent to interview their parents and the professional who had had most involvement with their journey and to access their file.
- Seeking all the additional information available from the young person’s file.
- Mapping out the young person’s transition journey (initially with the young person, then adding further details as they were established from subsequent interviews and their file).

### **The interviews**

Informed consent was provided by all of the young people. This was supported by the provision of a short information sheet and initial response form which allowed the researchers to contact the potential participant to provide further information and make an appointment to explain further about the research. An easy read information sheet, containing all of the details about the research was explained face to face using language appropriate to the individual. The consent form was also in an easy to understand format.

All of the individuals who expressed an initial interest in the research continued to take part in the interview. The young people were supported in the interviews through the use of easy sentences, with no jargon (this approach was taken only if required as a couple of the young people would have been insulted to be spoken to in this way). The young people’s journeys were drawn out on an A3 piece of paper noting all of the key changes in their life, who was involved and how they were involved in the decisions made about them.

The parents and professional were also provided with a detailed information sheet about the research and were able to ask for further information and clarification before signing the consent form. The parents’ contact details were provided by their young person, and parents often supported the researchers in locating the professional that the young person had nominated. None of the parents or professionals declined to be interviewed.

The interviews with young people were completed at a place of their choice. The venues included their own home, a pub or a room in a public library. Four of the young people were interviewed independently by the researcher, while the other four were supported by their parents or support worker. All but one of the interviews with parents and all but one of the interviews with nominated professionals took place over the telephone. The interviews were digitally recorded, with permission.

In the interviews with the young people they discussed their life at the moment including daytime and social activities, family and relationships. We then explored what happened when they left school, which areas of their life were considered and how they went about making decisions and who helped them at the various stages of their transition from school to their current adult life. We also discussed their involvement in any meetings about the changes in their lives and who was in charge of the changes. At the end of the interview, the young people were asked what the term transition meant to them and if this term was used when moving on from school. Finally, the young people were asked what they felt a good life would be for them and if they had it. The young people were thanked for taking part in the research with a £20 voucher for a store of their choice.

The interviews with the young people's parents and the professional nominated by the young person covered the same areas as the young people's interview, probing for further information regarding the use of person centred planning, details of the meetings/processes involved and any financial arrangements.

Each of the young people also provided consent for a researcher to look at their social services files. The files were primarily paper based. The researcher spent a number of days reading through the appropriate section of each participant's file beginning when they were 14 years of age. Any information relating to transition planning, inter-agency or support planning and the services/direct payments provided as a young adult were noted as well as any information about the costs of services provided.

Unfortunately, the files did not provide very much information regarding the transition plans made for the young people or about the cost of the support provided.

All of the information gathered regarding each participant was drawn together and a map describing their transition was developed.

## **Representative scenarios**

Once the case studies were developed and individual journeys had been mapped, 'representative transition journey scenarios' were developed including the key elements from both of the stories from each category of on-going post education or support (local FE provision in county, an Improving Choices bespoke learning programme, specialist out-of-county residential school placement or other provision). This strategy was developed in order that the anonymity of the young people could be maintained when professionals discussed types of transitions and their implications.

## **1.8 The Expert Panel meetings**

An 'expert panel' meeting was organised in order that types of transitions and the issues of importance raised during the case study phase could be discussed. The 'expert panel' was made up of knowledgeable professionals with detailed experience of the systems and context in Suffolk. The meeting specifically discussed:

- The term transition, the aim of transition planning and who should be involved in transition planning.

- The process of transition planning in Suffolk, including how the process is co-ordinated, the use of person centred planning and of direct payments.
- Each of the representative scenarios was then discussed. This discussion included:
  - Whether the scenario was typical and what variations there might be for different individuals.
  - Who would be involved in these transitions and how the planning should happen.
  - The benefits/issues for the fictional young person and their family.

Although, details or estimations of costs of services were sought, few were forthcoming during this meeting.

The expert panel took place in a private room at Suffolk County Council offices. Eight professionals took part in the discussion. All of the professionals were sent invitations to take part in the panel by the Lead Professional Children with Additional Needs. They were provided with a detailed information sheet about the research. Questions were answered about the research at the start of the expert panel meeting and all of the professionals completed a consent form. One of the professionals who took part in the expert panel was also part of the case study stage.

## **1.9 Analysis**

The information gathered during the case study phase and during the expert panel meetings were analysed thematically (Berg 1989) to draw out the shared aspirations and experiences of participants as well as issues faced by the young people, their families and the professional who supported them during the transition process. These themes are presented in section 2.

### **1.10 Consulting on the preliminary findings and collection of costs**

The final stage of the research involved consulting with professionals in Suffolk regarding the findings from the research in order that their responses and suggestions for improvement could be included in this report. This consultation was undertaken to ensure that the research included concrete recommendations which could be implemented in Suffolk.

Section 2 of this report, was distributed to key professionals in Suffolk with a specifically developed response form. This form invited free responses, asking the professional to highlight the issues of importance to them in their professional role and to present their response to these issues and make suggestions for improvements. Section 4 includes a summary of the professionals' responses to the themes presented in Section 2.

As the young people's files did not contain very much information about the cost of support and the expert panel meeting did not provide detailed information regarding the cost of services or time that would be dedicated by professionals, the original plan to cost out each of the transition journeys could not be completed. Instead, standard costs regarding educational placements were sought. The Lead Professional Children with Additional Needs contacted the relevant educational and individual support providers to establish standard costs which are detailed in Section 3.

## Section 2

This section presents the findings from the research into eight young peoples' transition journeys in Suffolk. It presents a retrospective look at how the young people, their parents and a professional involved with them think about the 'concept' of transition, how the transition journey 'worked' for these young people and the current outcomes for the young people. It also includes the views of the expert panel of professionals who have detailed experience of transition in Suffolk. These experts discussed the concept of transition and its process generally as well as the representative scenarios. (These scenarios discussed the issues from the young people's stories in a confidential manner, see methods section 1.7 and are presented in section 3). Relevant material collected from the young people's files is also included in this section.

The section begins with a discussion of:

- The general concept of transition.
- The outcomes for the young people and their prospects for the future.

It then discusses the processes involved and issues related to:

- Transition from school to college.
- Time at college.
- Alternative education.
- Support for young people remaining 'out-of-county'.
- Looked After Children.

The following levels of support for young people and their families, during transition from College are then discussed:

- Connexions only.
- Adult and Community services.

The chapter then looks at the:

- Parents' role.
- Different types of planning undertaken.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the issues and recommendations for the future suggested by the research participants.

### 2.1 What is transition?

'Going from school to adult life.' (Young person)

All research participants: the young people, parents and professionals, used similar terms to describe transition, these included 'moving on' from school to adult life and 'starting a new time in your life' in the 'big wide world'. This was a time when the young people thought they could potentially increase their independence.

Parents and professionals also highlighted the 'change in personnel', as young people moved from school to college, college to work/volunteering, or if eligible, from Children's to Adults' services.

Although, transition as a concept was generally regarded at least theoretically as holistic, meaning including all aspects of the young person's life (ie friendships and relationships, housing, employment), it was clear that the expectations held of transition varied according to individual perspectives. One professional summarised:

'Depends who is asked – social workers [discuss the move] from children to adult service or ideally[to] not need any services at all, school [discuss the] the move from one place of education to another, the young person might ... aim to go into work, might want to live with their friends .... it depends.' (Professional)

In reality the primary focus of the 'planned' transition was educational, moving from school to college, or as one young person put it 'just about college not the rest of my life'. Parents used terms such as 'assumption', 'presumption' to indicate the automatic nature of this educational transition. The next expected transition, which was followed by all of the young people, was from college to work or day time activity. This transition was regarded as 'unplanned' by services, for the majority of the young people in this study.

Transition was regarded by parents and some of the professionals, as an on-going activity which could last until the young person was in their late twenties and beyond. More than one parent made the point that these young people were likely to take longer than many of their non disabled peers to make these changes, and many of their peers didn't 'settle down' until they were in their mid to late twenties.

## **2.2 The outcome of the transition journey so far**

'[I'm a] Man of leisure.' (Young person)

All of the young people involved in this study had moved directly from school to college. The majority of the young people were educated in Suffolk, most in special schools and one in a mainstream high school. One young person had attended an out-of-county school and returned to Suffolk to attend college at age 16, while another moved from school to college in another county prior to returning to Suffolk and attending college.

At the end of their college experience, which in a number of cases involved a subsequent move to another college and in one case attending two colleges at once, the majority of the young people had developed a programme of activities to help 'fill their week' (parent). One of the young people was finishing a five year college course and thinking about continuing to attend college along with undertaking some volunteering related to her vocational interests.

It was recognised by the professionals that the young people in this study, and others with similar needs, 'can have a very poor transition', and that the options available to them could be very limited, particularly if they are not 'ready for work':

'[If] you don't meet Adults' [services] criteria and you are not ready for work, then you are pretty limited.' (Professional)

This reliance on particular types of college courses (animal husbandry, basic skills, etc) left young people largely unintegrated into the wider community, and, in some cases, still unprepared for work or volunteering opportunities. Furthermore questions of accommodation, independence and relationships were not identified and worked with by the professionals involved, leaving families and young people unsupported in these areas of life at a critical time.

This section goes on to discuss these young people's:

- Social activities.
- Current view of life.
- Lack of work opportunities.
- Aspirations for the future.

## **Social activities**

‘Her week is made up of activities which lean to her interest.’ (Professional)

These activities were generally social activities or activities such as art, drama, sailing, shopping and eating out. One young person, who had complex needs including challenging behaviour, had a package of two-to-one support 5 days per week. This allowed her to access the community and join social and creative activities such as a young women's drama group.

These leisure-like activities were regarded, by parents, as ‘babysitting’, activities which do not stimulate the young people or develop their skills but just ‘fill their time.’ One parent summed this up, saying:

‘The support in the community is more of a babysitting service, [with] support workers coming in who are not equipped to support and not looking at meaningful activities, just going out to lunch. Eating seems to form a large part of the day for many adults with learning difficulties as it is an easy option, they go out socialising.’ (Parent)

Professionals in the expert panel also agreed that the focus was on keeping the young people occupied often at the expense of the ‘softer skills’, such as money skills, time keeping, etc, which are ‘so important and underpin other outcomes’ (Expert professional). These softer skills are a critical component of transition, as they are required in order for young people to move on socially and relationally, as well to gain employment and live independently.

These leisure-like activities were, for some of the young people interviewed, combined with volunteering activities. These were undertaken either independently or with support from a personal assistant (PA) funded by the Adults and Community service through a direct payment. Most of the young people interviewed had volunteered with charities and the volunteering had involved shop work, cleaning, refurbishing equipment, creative and administrative office work and looking after animals. However, we noted that sometimes the activities were often menial e.g. cleaning offices, emptying bins, cleaning out animal cages, and life-skill learning opportunities were not exploited.

The ability to access voluntary activities was, in a couple of instances, restricted by a lack of support. An expert professional explained:

‘If they need a support worker to volunteer, [they] would need ACS (Adult and Community services) funding unless [an] organisation supported them. [It’s] not often that a young person volunteers without support.’ (Expert professional)

## **Current view of life**

‘It can get boring but not as boring as it was. I can go to the [volunteering activity] when I like.’ (Young person)

The young peoples’ views of their current lives ranged from being ‘happy’ with their current activities, but with little expectation of progression, to others who were clearly ‘bored.’ The young people who had left college and their parental home, also spoke of social isolation and the difficulty in making new friends. A professional summed up the situation:

‘In school and college young people have got a ready-made peer group around them. If they are not going into world of work, they can become very socially isolated. Where is their peer group? Where is their support? You hit your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and all of that just stops because you are an adult.’ (Professional)

This isolation was particularly pronounced when young people returned from residential school or college. One of the young people who had returned from a residential college summarised, that he had:

‘Lots of friends then ... [we] keep in touch on Facebook ... I miss them a little bit, if they were nearby, I would visit.’ (Young person)

Another parent, of the other young person who had returned from a residential college confirmed:

‘He has been ‘home’ since he was 21. He is 25 this year. [He has] only just made a group of friends .... [he] was socially isolated ... he often goes to the cinema on his own’. (Parent)

The young people were generally ambivalent about relationships, although one young person had a boyfriend she would Skype. One professional, however, specifically commented on the lack of opportunity available to the young people to develop relationships:

‘She doesn’t get the opportunity to meet a boyfriend or anything like that... that may not be considered enough by the professionals working with her.’ (Professional)

Generally it was felt that the social skills and relationship building aspects of young people’s lives had been neglected in their transition planning and subsequent support. Parents had often reassumed responsibility for creating and sustaining social opportunities for social contact. This was an ‘unnatural’ situation which was understandably resented by young adults.

## **Lack of work opportunities**

‘Paid employment is a very rare outcome for anyone coming through transition.’ (Expert professional)

The move to work was regarded as more of an ideal or ultimate aim rather than the likely reality for the young people. Only one of the young people involved in this study had any kind of paid



employment, and this was only for 2 sessions a week (they were still in receipt of benefits). This employment was a result of their bespoke learning programme (Improving Choices package - see section 2.4), which had introduced them to the setting.

Employment was only viewed as a viable option for the most able of these young people who were already 'very work ready'.

The expert panel members spoke clearly about the lack of willingness of employers to even consider supporting a young person as a volunteer or a paid member of staff, and the attitudinal change that is required to enable this. They also spoke about the decrease in specific services providing either specialist support to enable young people to access employment or directly providing supported employment for young people.

This lack of preparation and support (of both employers and the young people) is particularly poignant in the light of repeated comments from the young people that they would like to do meaningful work.

## **Aspirations for the future**

'Star in a west end musical.' (Young person)

All of the young people clearly expressed a desire to do more with their lives and to progress:

'Sometimes feel I'd like to try stuff, I watch Top Gear and think: 'I wonder if there are places you could drive fast' .... I like to keep my options open and try and find something I feel confident doing.' (Young person)

Vocational training was clearly desired by the young people, in order to facilitate employment in childcare, with animals, in music production and as gardener. These desires had been recorded in a number of the young people's files before they had begun their college career. The college courses they had attended had not focused on these desires (see section 2.3 below).

'He would like to go to college to learn how to help children, or learning how to help look after pets.' (Transition/annual review)

'NAME has been adamant for a number of years now that he wants to be a gardener.' (Scheduled child review)

One young person summarised the young people's shared desire to have a normal life:

'Get a job, get paid, go on holiday.' (Young person)

Parents confirmed this desire:

'A paid job that uses his skills.' (Parent)

'He has been looking for a full time job since 2007. He loves volunteering at the [volunteering activity]. Loves spending time with the animals. He cleans out the animals. There are no jobs there. He would like to retrain so he can be a vet's assistant.' (Parent)

One young person who was working, expressed the desire to get a better job as his current one was 'just bearable' and the hours were unsociable. He was seeking further qualifications to support this desire to progress. Concern was expressed by the professional involved with his case who felt that his situation could be viewed as a success and 'job done' as it:

'Ticks box for us because he is in paid work, but what about the rest of his life?'  
(Professional)

This young person was reported to be socially isolated and had a long-term desire to move out of the family home.

The young people and their parents also desired increased independence in other areas of the young person's life. Two of the young people were living away from home, one young person lived in supported shared housing. She had expressed a strong desire to move into her own place, which her mother had then 'fought for' (Parent). The other's housing had been organised by their family. A third young person, who had been looked after, lived in his own home with support.

The rest of the young people also wanted to have their own place eventually. Parents also wanted:

'Her to be self sufficient, she would need support and so on, she could live by herself, .... she is very organised.' (Parent)

'She would like to live with friends and would like to do cooking on her own.' (Parent)

Professionals also commented that some parents saw transition as a time when their role in their child's life might decrease as they became more independent and services 'took on some of the responsibility'. An expert professional commented:

'[There is an] expectation that kids are more independent now, young people have an expectation of actually having a life ... parents want a life too.' (Expert professional).

As shown, in section 2.4 below, parents continue to play a key role in supporting their son or daughter through transition and in their early adulthood, frequently with little support.

## **2.3 Stages of transition**

This section focuses on the stages of the transition journey, and discusses:

- Transition from school to college.
- Time at college.
- Alternative education – Improving Choices Bespoke Learning Programme.
- Support for young people remaining 'out-of-county'.
- Looked After Children.
- Transition from college including the role of parents and different agencies.

### **Transition from school to college**

'The school was very experienced at working with people like [name]. They were very on the ball.' (Parent)

All of the schools attended by the young people, whether in Suffolk or elsewhere, were praised for their commitment to ensuring a good transition for the young people. The special schools attended by the young people had a detailed programme of activities to facilitate the young people's transfer to college, which included meetings with parents, taster days at a variety of colleges, support for students to fill in application forms and prepare for interviews, as well as providing detailed information about the young person to the prospective/chosen college. The Connexions service worked in partnership with the school to arrange the 'link days' and to organise transport.

The parent of the one young person who attended a mainstream school specifically praised the way in which the school investigated the process of moving to college and followed it through:

'A letter invited me to the meeting, making sure it was mutually convenient, I had some minutes from the meeting. [I felt the] school did everything they could do within their powers, [and, as a mainstream school they were] working a process which was beyond their experience.' (Parent)

Two of the young people, in this study, had returned from a residential educational placement. One had returned at the end of school, the other after a transfer to a residential college in the out-of-county area prior to their return. These young people transitioned to college in a similar way as the other young people:

'[They] travel down for a day and then go back again .... It gives us only a snap shot of who they are.' (Expert professional)

The expert professionals varied in their opinion of the information offered to colleges by out-of-county schools and colleges:

'Some are very good – they realise the need for a good report or [the college] won't want to take them .... Others send a list of things that need to be done.' (Expert professional)

The professionals interviewed had no experience of receiving a person centred plan or 'proper transition plan from an out-of-county school'. One parent described how the local college had not taken up the offer of a teacher visiting the college to provide detailed information about the young person and their support needs. The issue of lack of individualisation of support at college is discussed below.

Concern was also expressed by the parents and professionals regarding Suffolk County Council's failure to send a representative to some young people's 14 plus review and transition planning meetings. This failure was recognised in relation to both transfer within Suffolk, and from out-of-county placements:

'Social worker has not attended residential school reviews (LEA).' (note in file)

'Acute concern from all present re: lack of progress from social care, especially with new emphasis on multi-agency working and "children with additional need".' (Minutes of meeting to discuss multi-agency approach to transfer and post 16 programme)

'[Name] does not have severe learning disabilities so does not meet the eligibility criteria of either my team or that of social services' Disabled Children and Young People, but I was very

concerned to hear that no social worker attends [Name's] Looked After Children's review at school - is this because the placement is paid for solely by Education? As [Name] is now 13, please could you advise me and the family whether it is a statutory responsibility for a Social Services representative to at least be present for his 14+ review? Should [name] be officially referred to Social Services via the 'Pink' referral form - if so please let me know so I can complete one.' (Letter from community nurse in file)

The expert professionals discussed that if a social worker was involved with planning a young person's return from residential school or college then the planning would start earlier, but would be inhibited by the distance and lack of knowledge of the young person and lack of time to develop an appropriate relationship. The expert professionals offered no guidance on how this difficulty could be addressed.

## **Time at college**

'I like [college name], they have lots of trips and treats, like going to the Military Museum, the pub and park. I've got lots of friends there.' (Young person)

Most of the young people enjoyed their experience at college, particularly their friendships, the interesting activities and trips out.

However, the young people and their parents were critical of the provision, feeling that the courses available were not individualised, but 'one size fits all' (Parent). The young people recalled:

'[I was] not sure what was happening at college – not sure if their hands were tied behind their backs or just treated everyone with the same brush.' (Young person)

The young people who were more academically able felt that they were not challenged:

'If I was looking after myself, I would have said I don't belong in that unit. They should have seen that I could do more. If you get to know me, you see I've got a bit of autism but don't stick my tongue out or anything.' (Young person)

This young person felt that he 'could have done maths at a higher level' .... 'might have been more able at English if given a bit of a push'. After 'failing' at his second college, this young adult took a community maths course, independently without support, and also learnt to drive while waiting for funding for an Improving Choices package. Another young person felt:

'I was treated like a younger person not as clever as I am.' (Young person)

She recalled being re-taught things that she had learnt at school. These concerns were recorded her file:

'On-going concern about the appropriateness of college course continues.' (Adult Scheduled Review)

Parents felt that these courses were more about social integration and time filling, rather than developing the young people intellectually. One parent described the college course as a 'holding

bay' while another parent felt that the course was 'adequate' as it aided social integration but that the college 'made their life easier by not pushing him'.

The young people felt that they were unable to access the standard courses at college:

'No support at college to do anything other than cooking and computer choices.' (Young person)

This lack of availability of appropriate courses was related by professionals to the level of support available. The support for learners with special educational needs was focused on the specialist 'Bridging Course' rather than being available to support the young people elsewhere. There was also an issue for the young people in gaining access to the mainstream courses as they would not have the grades required. A professional summarised:

'[He is] too able for the Bridging Course, he is very able but it's getting it all focused [and getting the] balance between support and intellectual ability. The support tends to be on the lower level courses .... Even though [he is] bright and high functioning, he was still limited by not having grades, so there are lots of courses he can't do. If you want to do brick laying, you need to do an entry level course beforehand'. (Professional)

A parent of a young person whose behaviour was described as challenging, also criticised the support available:

'Although a relatively small group, they are older and bigger, they didn't really have enough staff to deal with the problems that could occur. When [Name's] social worker and others went to see it on her behalf they decided it was damage limitation all the time.' (Parent)

At a more general level, College representatives were clear that detailed attention would be paid to planning for each student and that students would be able to change courses etc or be informed if there was nothing available for them.

## **Alternative education**

'A kind of virtual college.' (Parent)

Bespoke programmes of individualised learning were provided for two young people. These Improving Choices packages commonly known as 'Lapwing programmes' (as Lapwing was the main provider) were discussed extremely positively by all involved as they provided individualised programmes of education and support centred around the young people's interests. These programmes had led to young people taking up subsequent voluntary/paid work in their chosen vocational area.

In order to access an individualised programme of learning from Lapwing, young people had (at this time) to be 'refused' by a local college and an application made for funding. Connexions referred young people and supported this process. However, this process had negative consequences for the young person's self esteem as they have to 'fail' at college to get individualised support:

'Its awful [they] have to go through a failure before you can get the resources, things have to get worse before you can get better choices.' (Professional)

There was also a time lag for the young people between leaving college and starting the programme. A parent described her young person as 'left hanging, left to flounder' which had a negative impact on the young person's already fragile self esteem, and placed strain on parents left to manage with no placement at all in the interim.

### **Support for young people remaining 'out-of-county'**

'[It's] rare to move back home with parents.' (Expert professional)

Although two of the young people in this study had returned home from out-of-county placements, the expert panel members believed that it was far more likely that the young person would stay in the location where they had been educated rather than return home to Suffolk. The professionals were clear:

'If [the young person is] away, parents fight to keep the young person in the area, [they] refuse for their child to go home and the FACS (Fair Access to Care criteria) goes right up. They apply to the local area where they were educated for housing and support, but they [other local authority] always bat it back to us... we involve legal departments... [In the interim the] service is provided and we fight over who pays the bill after.' (Professional)

It was felt by the expert professionals that out-of-county providers were keen to retain the young people using their services, ie further residential education or supportive education, and that 'colleges sell this to parents':

'Schools have their own agenda, they are getting £2000 a week. They emphasise the things they are doing and push for their own services. They tell parents how good they are and services they can provide [in the future].' (Expert professional)

This was felt to feed into:

'Parents' desire to give all siblings the same experience. If other children go away then the child with special [educational] needs to go away .... They would have had peer group if [they had] gone to the local college.' (Expert professional).

If young people did return from out-of county placements and they were eligible for support from Adult and Community services then the assessment process would 'start from square one', 'as they wouldn't be known to Adult services.' The young people would be provided with accommodation, if required, as they would be regarded as homeless, see section 2.4, below.

### **Looked After Children (LAC)**

'Some of the looked after young people get a better transition service than those who are not, [their] issues are looked at, planned and reviewed .... Planning for what is next is usually really good.' (Professional)

One of the young people in this study had been 'looked after'. This young person's file clearly showed on-going planning and consideration of their future needs through the LAC process. The application for funding for his future support summarised the situation:

‘Request to develop service for [name] to begin July 2009 as severe learning disability but does not present as such, no family contact, extremely vulnerable, impact of difficult childhood, no family or social networks. Suggestion of supported living with 24 hour support as unsafe and needs support with behaviour and boundaries ... [Name] is going to be entirely reliant on the local authority for all his care needs into and throughout his adult life.’ (CHAPP approval form)

At the time of this study, this young person was living in their own accommodation and, until very recently, had had 24 hour support. Although his file indicated that the transition from foster care to his own home was not as smooth as it could have been as a crisis had occurred resulting in an earlier move than originally planned, there was a clear record of the options discussed, alternative plans made and the involvement of a number of professionals.

His support was monitored through annual reviews of his pathway plan, he had just left college and was spending time volunteering and organising his house. He also wanted to have a job, as was recorded at an early stage in his file, but as with the other young people he felt that he had little support to help him find employment.

## **2.4 Transition beyond education**

This section discusses the support provided by:

- Connexions.
- College.
- Improving Choices Bespoke Learning programme.
- Adults and Community services.

It then discusses the parents’ roles and the different types of planning undertaken.

### **Connexion’s role**

‘It all goes to Connexions.’ (Young person)

‘Connexions advisor worked really hard to try and get it right for [Name.]’ (Parent)

Professionals recognised the key role played by Connexions:

‘Parents don’t know who to turn to so they tend to ring Connexions.’ (Professional)

The young people and their parents generally praised Connexions workers with whom they were in contact. Connexions workers had supported the young people to access community courses and investigate voluntary and supported employment opportunities.

‘[Name] is attending a course from Connexions. This course/group helped him get the volunteer job.’ (Parent)

Each young person had access to a Connexions advisor, or a series of Connexions advisors. Their role was as a ‘signposting service’, assessing young people and working out what was ‘out there for them’ and ‘making sure the planning happened.’ Connexions advisors were regarded as holding a large amount of knowledge. They were available to talk to young people and their parents at college

parents' evenings when they were coming up to leaving school as well as at other times agreed with the young person and/or their family.

However, after assessing and signposting, Connexions did not have any funding to ensure that the identified services/support was provided. They were reliant on support and funding from Adult and Community services, for those young people who were eligible:

'Connexions only go so far as [we] have no money, [there] needs to be a piece of work by Adult services.' (Professional)

Advisors discussed how they:

'Helped parents chivvy up referrals with social care, [as] the social worker is working on the accommodation side. Once we know where they will live and what their support package is, then I will see if there is anything I can do like organise part-time education.'  
(Professional)

Parents and the Connexions advisors spoke of high caseloads, which inhibited long-term support to young people, and of the restriction of being 'geographically based' (allocated to a college or an area) rather than being allocated on a long-term basis to individuals.

'[Young people are] entitled to service until 25, but we don't follow up unless they come to us, unless we are still working with them.' (Professional)

'[Name] was put in touch with Connexions which referred him to different services - Remploy, Papworth Trust, Mencap .... and some more. They (Connexions) got in touch with him and then disappeared into the sunset.' (Parent)

## **College's role**

Representatives of colleges, present at the expert panel meeting, were concerned about the lack of support for young people moving on from education. An expert professional commented that colleges:

'Learners have a very successful journey at college, but then drop off the face of the earth.'  
(Expert professional)

Colleges were 'looking at what they can do to support' (Expert professional) young people when they leave. They completed an 'exit document', and worked with parents, social workers, and supporting agencies such as Connexions to 'look to see how they can support learners to adult life'. Colleges were not required to be involved in this process but were concerned for their 'learners'.

The colleges recognised that locating supported employment for these young people, as discussed in section 2.3, was 'a real challenge' but a task which at least one college had set itself.

Specific support from college regarding moving on was mentioned by one parent who described college parents' evenings where his daughter's future was discussed and initial plans were made.



## **Moving on from Improving Choices Programme**

At the end of an Improving Choices programme, see section 2.4 for more details of bespoke learning programme, there was a clear transition planning process. Reviews were planned in February or March, prior to the package ending in July. Efforts were made to invite and involve all of the important people in the young people's lives, including Connexions, voluntary organisations, circle co-ordinators and Adult and Community/Transition social workers. Connexions were not generally involved with young people undertaking a learning programme. One review discussed, during the expert panel meeting, involved twenty people, including the young person. Actions were given out at these meetings and Lapwing would co-ordinate and follow up the process:

'The plan depends on young people .... there can be a massive long list of stuff or a few things for few people, it does cover everything. It is more holistic. Issues are delegated or if a social worker is needed we go back to customer first and ask for an assessment. Lapwing don't take responsibility for other issues but do chase up.' (Expert professional)

Lapwing could not, as discussed below, ensure that Adult and Community services would be involved in the forward planning.

## **Adult and Community services**

'This is the issue - we are so stretched. We are doing crisis work and they are way down the waiting list.' (Expert professional)

The expert professionals explained that the Adult and Community services teams were really over stretched. They were constantly 'fire fighting' (Expert professional). The professionals were clear that support was only provided to the young people with the highest needs, or those who were in a crisis (such as being homeless) or whose parents needed support in order to continue in their caring role.

'The Adults' team is over loaded, so we pick up accommodation issues first as they are vital, coming home from school etc. (Expert professional)

Services were provided in response to someone:

'Banging a drum.' (Expert professional).

If young people were not at risk but 'safe at home', the lowest possible level support would be provided in order to support their parents to continue in their caring role. Adult and Community services staff would try to avoid crises for young people who are 'borderline cases' by offering preventative support. Support workers would carry out an assessment and provide skills training.

The professionals recognised that the young people would be 'bored but safe', and that little attention would be paid to their future development. Their cases were 'filtered out':

'We will put name on list but [we] have to be realistic. They won't get anything unless there is a crisis.' (Expert professional)

This was clearly related, by the expert panel members, to the funding available as well as the capacity of the Adult and Community services teams. There was little mention of specialist

transition workers being involved with young people as the team's capacity had halved in the last few years. The transition team was only involved with one of the eight young people involved in this study.

Parents were well aware of the lack of support available and the Adult and Community teams' crisis-driven response. One expert professional noted:

'Some parents threatened to bring to bring their child to the offices and leave them there.'  
(Expert professional)

Two the families of young people involved in this study had threatened to withdraw their support if services were not offered. One parent asked for residential care while another moved house which resulted in the young person becoming 'homeless'. A young person's file recorded:

'There is a risk to sustaining the close relationship and caring role with [parent] who has expressed that she will not be able to cope with [Name] living with her if he is not adequately supported to prevent inappropriate behaviour.' (CHAPP form – risk section)

The parent of the other young person stated:

'[I] forced the issue by saying he could no longer live here, partly because I couldn't cope and partly because I knew that within Adult services that was the only way to get something done.' (Parent)

Parents recognised that:

'Those who shout loudest get most.' (Parent)

The young people's case records did not record focused on-going planning even when the young people were eligible for and in receipt of services from Adult and Community services.

One of the young people's current social worker, looking back on her file, commented regarding the lack of planning:

'There was no clear plan around accommodation in past, although [there is a] good weekly routine there was no particular plan around that. [There is] no evidence of thinking of employment or related study... [There was] no clear plan around where she wanted to live ... [I am] not sure how planned that move was [it seems it was] based on availability of service not on any plan and now [it has] been found that it isn't really meeting her needs'.  
(Professional)

This professional continued to note that there was no joint work between Children and Adult services, just a case transfer:

'There doesn't appear to be any joint work between Adults' and Children's services when she was going to be transferred over. It seems they [Adult services] were just contacted 'please accept case responsibility' from Children's services. Adults' then picked up the case. The onus would be on the Adult social worker to liaise with Children's social worker and do a full assessment but there is an issue around work pressure and lack of resources ... It doesn't

look like [Name] ever had an in-depth transition plan and that would have been an ideal time to sit down and do an in-depth piece of work, a person centred plan and look at what is your ideal, what goals do you have, where do you want to live.’ (Professional)

This young woman’s mother organised her volunteering and organised her personal assistants who were funded through a direct payment. This mother had changed her own career in order to be able to co-ordinate and organise her daughter’s personal assistants and personal budget.

Similarly, concern was expressed regarding the lack of transition planning for another of the young people, for whom college was regarded as providing structure and routine he required. A referral to Adults and Community services stated:

‘I feel that this referral is urgent as [Name’s] future is very uncertain and this makes him very anxious’ .... ‘joint working between myself and a worker from the PLD team would be essential for a smooth transition for [Name] into adulthood and Adult services.’ (Referral form)

There is no record of this joint working being carried out. Another parent whose child was ‘FACS eligible’ and been allocated a high level of support in accordance with the RAS clearly stated the lack of long-term professional involvement. She had:

‘A letter saying that [Name’s] social worker is leaving and that the case doesn’t need covering as [Name] is at college till next year. It tells mum to contact Connexions as ‘they will be able to support [Name] to access educational opportunities’ and to look on the website [www.nolimits.org.uk](http://www.nolimits.org.uk) .... Mum will need to contact social care again in new financial year (April 2007) so carer’s assessment can be reviewed and new bid made for funding of the privately arranged respite. Contact duty worker on [phone number].’ (Notes made from case file)

The mum summarised the feelings of the majority of the parents:

‘They [social workers] don’t stay with you, just do a piece of work and move on .... [you] have to ring up the dreadful customer first which is like ringing a black hole and then they put you on to the person they think could deal with it or the next in line, not the person who has gone through it with you and that knows everything.’ (Parent)

## **Parent’s role**

‘Mum is a great fighter for him .... I hate to think where he would be without her.’ (Professional)

‘I become an expert but not out of choice.’ (Parent)

The young people, their parents and professionals recognised that parents provided the majority of support to the young people during transition.

Professionals were only able to provide minimal or crisis support. One parent summarised:

‘People kept in touch but was hit and miss... there wasn’t a system that picked things up and sorted them.’ (Parent)

One parent ‘felt she was carrying the process’ when applying for an Improving Choices programme. Another parent, whose child was eligible for support from Adult and Children’s services and who received direct payments, recalled:

‘We ran out of options, it was me really that was scheduling a timetable for her and researching what other activities she was involved with ... I was trying to come up with a meaningful time table. She was offered voluntary work in a charity shop ... this meant me dropping her off and picking her up, an 80 minute round trip each time. [There was] an assumption that I wasn’t working ... Because there wouldn’t have been any other transport routes ... I’ve done bus training etc [with her] so she can access things ... I have had to work my career around her, I’ve changed my career a number of times to accommodate what she has needed to try and maximise opportunities for her. Having said that [I think that] it hasn’t really worked out ... and she has been disappointed and frustrated and I don’t think she has found what she was looking for.’ (Parent)

All of the parents knew recognised that they would have to initiate changes for their young person and use their own initiative and their own networks for advice and support.

‘Yeah, we’ve got to initiate it, ‘cos there are only a few places [sheltered housing] out there... Who we initiate it with I have no idea. What we will do is talk to the parents of someone who has already moved out.’ (Parent)

One family had already organised accommodation privately for their young person.

Only one professional expressed concern regarding the control held by parents which could result in ‘over protection’ from both family members and the professionals with whom they are involved who are also ‘very risk averse’ and ‘are always going to err on the side of caution’. This was felt to inhibit the young people’s ability to learn from their mistakes and exert their independence.

## **2.5 Types of planning**

The key factors in the development of any type of transition planning were regarded as the timing, reviewing and updating of the plan:

‘It is the way they follow the person and get implemented that is important’. (Expert professional).

‘It’s not the plan though, it’s whether it is reviewed ... the actual process of planning with the young person is important and the more involvement the better... [We need to] make chats meaningful rather than just ticking a box and saying everything is fine.’ (Professional)

The best time for planning was recognised as being ‘the earlier the better’, yet with the constraints within which Adult and Community services worked, planning was often very late. This left the young person and their family anxious and looking for opportunities themselves.

This section discusses:

- General transition planning.
- Person Centred planning.
- Support planning with personal budgets.
- Circles of support.

## **General transition planning**

‘There were meetings at school about going to college. His parents, social worker, the head and key worker from school. Sometimes I wasn’t in the meetings they wanted to talk without me being there - they were thinking about me getting bored in meetings ... I do get bored easily’. (Young person)

The young people spoke about their involvement in planning their ‘transition’ while at school. They were all invited for all or some of their 14 plus reviews. Those who attended local schools took part in taster days, as discussed in 2.4, at local college to help them decide which college they would like to attend.

When leaving college, the young people and their parents discussed their future plans with tutors who then worked with the young people to follow up ideas, such as further vocational training or voluntary work. Connexions workers would also meet with the young person. They would try to tailor their approach to the individual by either having meetings alone with the young person, with their parents, meeting them in their college group or by following up discussions by telephone.

Some young people also accessed the ‘Info bar’ (a drop in facility) for further support, information and social contacts.

Some of young people involved in this study were also supported by their parents to follow up opportunities themselves. One young person recalled:

‘I found [volunteering activity] myself.’ (Young person)

He had used a volunteering website.

The young people supported by Lapwing were ‘quite involved in the ‘process’ of their transition onwards. One professional summarised:

‘With Lapwing, there would have been person centred reviews, one meeting I went to there were 15-20 people there, 2-3 people there from college. The family are certainly involved when young people are with Lapwing’. (Professional)

Connexions advisors, as noted above, would not be involved in reviews organised by Lapwing even though they may well provide support once the programme had finished.

## **Person Centred Planning**

Only one of the young people had a person centred plan (PCP). This PCP was lodged in his file. Another young person mentioned having made a plan at age 20 when his Improving Choices programme was coming to an end. He also had a ‘circle of support’ which had helped him access the

community. The young person who had been 'looked after' had a Pathway Plan which was reviewed annually.

The person centre plan located in the files focused on the young person's likes, dislikes, what he is good at and what his dreams are including:

'To have a job at .... (work experience),  
to have my own place with proper food with me cooking and inviting people round,  
to have my own home with friends,  
to not to have to do my own washing or ironing,  
to be more independent on public transport,  
to get to know more people and try different things,  
to go on holiday to Disney world,  
to drive a car,  
to paint a picture.'

The plan included pictures of the young person and was in an easier to read format with appropriate pictures to illustrate the points included.

The professionals spoken to did not put any particular importance on having a person centred plan, believing that similar areas were covered in a support plan that was developed when providing the young person with direct payments. They also noted that PCPs were developed in a variety of contexts such as education and day centres and were context specific focusing on what to do during the day – ie in day care or alternatives to day care rather than the whole of the young person's life. PCPs were described as ranging from 'realistic', in the current financial context, to completely 'blue sky thinking' – ie entirely unrealistic. The professionals felt that concept of PCP did not currently impact greatly on service planning and believed that more clarity was required around the use and implications of PCP.

## **Support planning with a personal budget**

A support plan, which was developed as part of obtaining a personal budget was considered 'very similar' to a PCP.

'Everyone should be offered a personal budget, the support plan is a PCP with money... Person centred planning is applied to development of a support plan... They are very very person centred domains around the things outside customers' immediate sphere. It could identify how health needs could be met but not supply the money for that... You can't use social care money for health needs.' (Expert Professional)

The development of a support plan and use of personal budgets had important financial implications for Adult and Community Services. Even though it was clear, from the evidence in files that 'points

mean prizes' (professional) in relation to RAS scores, the workers would ensure that the budget provided was as 'cost effective as possible' (Expert Professional). Another professional concurred:

'If [it is] quite a high score but they are safe at home... we would look at what need support for... ie go shopping, ten hours one to one. This is cheap so we give this amount.'  
(Professional)

It was hoped, by the professionals, that when Adult and Community services was involved links would be made with Health for support with socialisation or attachment issues, and that attention would be paid to softer outcomes which are necessary to progress in life and on entering employment. It was also recognised that an aim of the support plan should be to access community activities and to provide 'one to one for an induction period' and 'to try and reduce dependency'. This was with the intention of both:

'Creating independence which is a goal and also saving money. Once you've created independence then [you can] remove the support'. (Expert professional)

It was also recognised that direct payments had the added benefits, for Adult and Community services, that the young person's parents could be assumed to be responsible for the organisation of personal assistants and activities, see section 2.4. This made it 'cheaper and easier for ACS' but had potentially detrimental impacts on the young people's independence from their parents while increasing the responsibility and workload for parents.

## **Circles of support**

Circles of support were regarded, by the expert professionals, as helpful in enabling young people to focus on and attain their goals using friendship and community resources:

'Circles of support [are] seen to work really well. They might not get a service, but get support towards their goal and possibly this is how it should be... In ordinary life friends or family would tip in to take you to football or whatever. It draws out a plan, draws out a network and who is available to them. It is not seen as a doorway to services, but helps to put what is out there into a plan.' (Expert professional)

Circles were not regarded as common and professionals from Adult and Community services were 'not encouraged to participate in circles' as it took too much time. A special case could be made by Adult and Community service professionals in order to be able to attend a circle meeting.

## **2.6 Summary of issues**

A number of themes permeated the discussions with the young people, their parents, the professionals involved in the young person's transition journey and the discussion with the expert panel.

The themes are summarised as:

- A lack of options/aspirations for the young people.
- A lack of clarity around the transition process.
- A lack of planning and ongoing support.

## **A lack of ability to respond to young people's aspirations**

'Dumping people in college or day services. Sending them to activities that don't achieve anything.' (Expert professional)

The young people, their parents and professionals involved in this study felt that little attention was paid to the young people's long term aspirations. A professional summarised:

'Our young people have a ceiling on their aspirations.' (Professional)

A parent recalled, the discussions about her daughter's future as:

'Frustrating, annoying. I can see that I was going down a pathway that wasn't necessarily leading anywhere... I've seen people with learning difficulties who are stuck, no opportunities. This is not what [Name] wanted.' (Parent)

The expert professionals were clear that Adult and Community services could not, at the current time, support young people with their aspirations. They were only able to respond to crises and ensure that young people were 'safe' at home, or accommodated appropriately elsewhere:

'There's a difference between safe at home and reaching aspirations.' (Expert professional)

With respect to housing provision for the majority of the young people, it was recognised by members of the expert panel that:

'Lots of young people have aspirations to move on [move out of home]... the reality is different.' (Expert professional)

## **Lack of options**

'He said to me... that there is precious little available at the moment.' (Parent)

All of the discussion with the young people, parents and professionals revealed a lack of options for the young people at each of the different stages of their transition journeys. Young people and their parents felt it was assumed that the young person would go to college. The planning for this first transition was felt to focus solely on the young person's education rather than their life as a whole.

Work, as discussed in section 2.2 above, was not considered a realistic option for the majority of the young people, due to a lack of support and an unwillingness amongst local employers to employ young people with additional needs.

## **Lack of planning and support**

'If you have a disabled kid, you don't really know what is going to happen. No-one ever really tells you what is going to happen... If you have a kid with a disability to you think that people are going to go out of their way to make it easier for you, whereas it seems that people go out of their way to make it more difficult for you... The system is fighting against you more often than not.' (Parent)

There was no detailed planning when the young people left college, although Connexions and Colleges were providing low level support, such as information, co-ordination and advice.



Connexions were unable to maintain ongoing relationships with young people while Adult and Community services were unable to engage with general planning and support for young people or to provide packages of care with the specific purpose of supporting their development and independence.

Parents expressed disappointment that there was no opportunity to 'sit with [their young person] and plan for the future' with dedicated professional input. They were also disappointed about the lack of clarity about the transition process. Parents described the process of their young person moving on from college as 'foggy' and 'unclear.'

Similarly, professionals recognised the lack of support which would enable, particularly the more able, young people to work towards their aspirations:

'People fall through the gaps quite often... Those are the ones who if they got a bit of intervention earlier like travel training, would be ready to access employment programmes etc. But it doesn't often work like that.' (Expert professional)

Any planning that was undertaken with the young people and their family members was also inhibited by a lack of knowledge regarding what might be available. Professionals spoke of 'constantly moving goal posts particularly in education' and the decreasing opportunities for voluntary and supported employment. Professionals were clear that they 'couldn't promise anything' only that there might be support, for instance, 'to access work based activities'.

The young people, parents and professionals specifically commented on the lack of appropriate/specialist social activities. Young people were unable to access social groups for disabled children and found that there was a lack of equivalent groups and services for young adults. This difficulty was further inhibited, by the belief, held by at least one professional, that

'These young people not want to mix with [other] disabled young people but don't fit into anything else. They don't feel welcome and their parents feel they will be vulnerable.'  
(Professional)

The professionals were also clear that outcomes for young people at transition were not consistent and that they clearly related to parents' ability to fight, 'who you know' and often where they lived geographically.

'Transition is affected by how confident the parent is and who you have around you, who your (Connexions) advisor is... the experience could be very different depending on who is involved.' (Professional)

## 2.7 Recommendations for the future

The young people, their parents and professionals described the improvements that could be made to the transition process in which they had been involved. These improvements included:

- Earlier and ongoing planning by a consistent worker.
- Recognition of ongoing transitions until the young people are in their late twenties.

### **Earlier and ongoing planning and review by a consistent worker/co-ordinator**

‘More workers, more planning in advance, with all right people there at the right time.’  
(Professional)

‘Having more active involvement on all fronts, housing being considered rather than lip-service being paid, having meaningful plans... an all round plan that they are working towards rather filling up the time, just planning for the next few years, not knowing where they are going after that.’ (Parent)

Transition planning and support should be provided to enable all of the young people to achieve their aspirations and continue their personal development. It should focus on all aspects of their lives. This is particularly important for young people who have a ‘small package’ of support or are not provided with any support from Adult and Community services in order to introduce them to new environments, to develop their ‘softer’/‘social’ skills and enable them to access the community and work environments.

Young people require an on-going relationship with one worker or ‘co-ordinator.’ This worker could then develop a good understanding of the young person. This would enable them to be realistic about the young person’s abilities as well as to test out different and more imaginative options. It was recognised that some young people with special educational needs:

‘Need experiences, taster sessions, visits etc and gradual changes with some consistency, one thing that carries on.’ (Parent)

The relationship should begin early when the young person and their family were not ‘in crisis’ and could develop a coherent transition plan which would involve other relevant professionals. A professional summarised:

‘The best transition plans completed when there is not so much of a crisis and you’ve got the time. You need eight to ten months to reality test options and tread through a lot of the emotional issues along the way.’ (Professional)

It was recognised that when the current transition team’s earlier involvement was beneficial:

‘Stuff that comes from the transition team has been worked through with families and is more of a finished product, leaving Adult [and Community] to say yes we will give the funding and do the reviews.’ (Expert Professional)

### **Recognition of ongoing transitions until late twenties**

‘Takes a lot longer to be on an even keel.’ (Parent)

All of the parents were clear that transition, for their young person was a long standing process and in many cases was still ongoing. These young people need a 'more gradual transition, joined up thinking between organisations which builds on what has been before' and allows 'the small progressive steps' (Parent). Support should be provided to the young people and their families until they were in their late twenties.

## Section 3

This section presents the 4 'representative scenarios' developed from the eight case studies of young peoples' transition journeys in Suffolk.

Each of the representative scenarios includes time attending a local further education (FE) college. The young people attended FE after leaving school or after returning from residential college. All but one of the young people had attended local special school or out-of-county school/college. One of the young people had attended a mainstream school. None of the representative scenarios includes paid work as this was a much desired but not realised aspiration for the majority of the young people. Only one of the young people involved in the research had any kind of paid employment and this was only for a few hours a week. This young person was still in receipt of benefits and was not fulfilled by his work.

Each of the young people's transitions included 3 or 4 stages usually including a couple of different colleges or a combination of colleges prior to leisure like activities during the day, and for some, voluntary work. Only one of the young people had a substantial level of support (2:1) during the day.

Only two of the young people had moved out of the parental home, one family had provided accommodation while another had been provided with housing after becoming 'at threat of homelessness'. A third young person who had been 'Looked After' was provided with housing and 24 hour support.

All of the young people expressed a desire for more friendships. Those who had been away to school/college felt they did not fit in with the other young people with special educational needs as they hadn't known them at school.

The transitions were not considered 'complete' by the young people (who were all in their mid to late 20's) and their parents.

### 3.1 Representative Scenarios

Four representative scenarios highlighting the key themes from the eight case studies are presented. The fictional young people described have been named: Neil, Jane, Marcus and Laura.

#### Neil

Neil is on the autistic spectrum, he might be described as 'bright' or 'high functioning'. He is extremely able to express himself verbally regarding his life but may struggle with new social situations. He has difficulties with academic study.

Neil followed the 'expected route' from special school to the local college course for students with special educational needs. This move was discussed at his 14 plus review and he attended on 0.5 day a week basis for a term to see if he liked the college option.

However, when he started college Neil found the college course offered him little choice of activity and was inappropriate for his educational needs. He didn't feel challenged educationally and didn't want to study bricklaying, cookery or gardening.

Eventually, Neil's college 'placement' broke down and he was at home during the day for a period of 7 months. During this time, Neil was supported by Connexions. There didn't seem to be any 'standard' college courses or work experience placements that were suitable for Neil. Connexions worked with Neil to think about options and an application for funding for support Improving Choices programme was developed.

Neil was awarded funding to engage with a bespoke learning package with Lapwing for two years. He did further basic skills – literacy and numeracy work as well as specific training to be a radio DJ.

Neil now does volunteer work, but is looking for more meaningful activity hopefully employment.

Neil lives at home and has strong support from his mum. He doesn't currently express any interest in having a partner and sees a few friends that he made at college intermittently.

## **Jane**

Jane is a very charming young woman. She is often described using the diagnosis she has received as 'having Downs Syndrome'.

Jane went to a local special school, where she had lots of friends. This special school is very good at supporting its students to look at different colleges for their post 16 education. The planning for her move to college started at her 14 plus review. Jane would have happily stayed at school longer, but this option was not available to her.

Jane moved on to the special unit at the local college. Jane enjoys college, she has lots of friends there, they go on lots of trips and do interesting activities as well as courses focusing on basic skills. Jane would have liked more of a focus, in her courses, on getting her ready for work and getting a job.

Jane stayed at college for 5 years. She now volunteers a few hours a week at the Cats' Home. She says she is bored a lot of the time. She says that Connexions have helped her look for more courses and work experience but that she wasn't involved in any 'proper planning' about what to do next or getting a job. Jane would benefit from one-to-one work to help her maintain her motivation as she can be very passive if not directed in her volunteer placements.

Jane has direct payments for a few hours a week, so that she can pay for support to go to a couple of social activities. Jane's parents were instrumental in seeking out support to get direct payments and now manage the payments and the support workers for her. This takes a minimum of a day a month and relies on her parents having the specific skills needed to manage staff and finances. Jane has only had contact with a social worker in the last couple of years in order to access direct payments.

Jane currently lives with her parents but is thinking of moving out. Her parents are concerned that they would need to organise this. Jane would need a lot of support to organise this move and to organise herself to do the practical everyday things once she has moved out.

## **Marcus**

Marcus went away to school at age 11. His parents were unhappy with the school that was offered to them for Marcus when moving on from his mainstream primary school. His parents went to Tribunal which ruled that Marcus could go the residential school chosen by his parents.

Marcus attended this out-of-county school until he was 16. He then moved to the Further Education college linked with the school. Marcus, his parents and school transition worker planned for this move. The planning started at his 14 plus review. Marcus attended this residential college until he was 19. He undertook basic skills units as well as more vocational units in readiness for work. Marcus would like to work with people.

Marcus left college when he was 19 and returned to Suffolk. He moved back in with his parents and made contact with Connexions. He was aiming to get a job, but couldn't find any work that was suitable for him. Connexions found him a number of 'volunteer placements' with the hope of these leading to a paid job.

Marcus enjoyed being back with his family, but misses his friends from college. He keeps in touch with them on Facebook and sometimes goes to visit them for the weekend. He has started going to some social activities for people with 'additional needs' but has found that the young people all know each other well. He often feels lonely and left out at these events as he doesn't know the young people from school.

## **Laura**

Laura went to a local special school and then to the local college special educational needs course.

Laura decided for herself to leave home. She had a circle of support, which is attended and organised by her parents, which gave her ideas for the future. Her parents felt that this circle was great for coming up with ideas but that these ideas were unrealistic and there wasn't anyone else to follow them through. Connexions are involved with her circle and in suggesting activities to do during the day.

Laura moved to a shared house, which offers a low level staff support with regard to maintaining her tenancy. The house is in a small town, which was her choice as there is more social activity there than in the country where she lived with her parents.

Laura has twenty five hours of support in order to help her maintain her tenancy and do activities in the community as well as some skills work around cooking and managing her money. This support and community involvement helps Laura with her mental health support needs. Laura doesn't have a partner but has some friends she sees at her organised social activities. Laura doesn't really talk about getting a job or know what she would like to do in the future, she thinks about her life on a day-to-day basis. Laura is thinking about moving again, as she would like a home with more privacy. She doesn't really like sharing her living space with other young people.

## 3.2 Cost of provision

As noted in section 1, we were unable to cost out the young people's transition journeys as planned. However, we were able to collect some indicative costs and to locate some discussions regarding funding of support in the literature.

Table 1 presents the cost located for the representative scenarios above. These costs were very difficult to locate due to current systems and processes in Suffolk. Many services are commissioned 'in bulk' rather than on an individual basis. The costs should be regarded as indicative or as a guide rather than the exact cost of educational placements or ongoing support.

**Table 1 Costs of education and support**

Young person	Support	Cost per year	Total	Current Outcomes
Neil	Improving Choices programme	£24, 743.63 (year 1) £31, 353.93 (year 2) £46, 299 (year 3)	£107 082.52	Able to attend a course alone  Volunteer work  Socially isolated  Living at home
Jane	Local FE college courses for 5 years (at two colleges )	£875, £940, £1205, £1338, £1419 (cost per year for 5 years, college 1)  £880, £2240, £240 (cost per year for 3 years, college 2)	£5759 £3360 £9119 (Total for both colleges)	Looking at further college course combined with voluntary work  Wanting to move out of home
Marcus	Out-of-county residential school	£77 301 (year 1) £85 039 (year 2)	£162 340	Volunteer work  Living at home
	Out-of-county residential college	£32 92 (year 1) £36 850 (year 2) £37 771 (year 3)	£107 550	Socially isolated
	Local FE college	Cost unavailable*		
Laura	Local FE college	Cost unavailable*		Activities in the

	Support to move to independent living 25 hours of support	£13 per hour at 2008 prices  Costs for supported living placement unavailable	£16 900	community (Leisure/hobby)  Living in supported shared housing  25 hours support  Wanting to live independently
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Table 2 presents additional costs located in the young people's files.

**Table 2        Costs for support from the young people's files**

Package	Type of support	Cost per element
A	24 hour support in own home	Term time £1516.77 per week  College holiday £1834.77 per week  (2010 prices)
B	1:1 support to access volunteering activity	£9.66 per hour (2006 prices)
C	Support for independent living	£13 per hour (2008 prices)
D	2:1 support for 35 hours per week. One support workers paid for by ACS and one by Independent Living Fund.          Respite care	Cost for one worker £463.75 per week  £927.50 total per week for two workers  (client contribution half DLA £35.18)  £48 230 pa  Mileage 63 @30p = £19.20 per week totalling £998.40  14 nights per year @£35 = £490  (2009 prices)



### 3.3 Comments and insights from the literature

Tables 1 and 2 above show that some of the education/support provided to the young people involved in the research was at considerable financial cost and that there was a human cost for the majority of the young people who were not in employment or contributing to society, had not fulfilled their aspirations and were often lonely.

This situation appears, from the literature and discussions with the expert professionals to be 'typical' (see the themes described in the literature in Section 1 and Section 2). Gitsham et al (2011) presents the example of 'Matthew's' experiences. He attended residential college at £30,000 for year 1, and £43,000 for the second year. There was with no clear transition planning nor did he have work experience that related to his career goals.

Knapp et al (2008) calculated the costs to the economy of disabled people's unsuccessful transitions which do not enable them to achieve the educational or employment goals they desire. It was found that there were losses in direct and indirect tax revenue and national insurance contributions when comparing potential earnings of non-disabled people with equivalent qualifications. The costs (at 2005-2006 prices) were £76 per week for employed disabled males and £128 for unemployed disabled males.

A report for the Office for Disability Issues (Hurstfield et al 2007) compared the costs of providing support for two young people:

- Andrew who had severe learning disabilities and a slight physical impairment.
- Chris who had severe developmental delay after an illness as a baby.

Andrew was provided with:

- An out-of-county placement at £170,000 pa, (not including transport costs) a total over the 3 and over 3 years of £510,000.
- Benefits including DLA £3330 and mobility £2345 pa.

These cost totalled £170,670 per year.

This type of support was not what his family desired as they have preferred a personalised course at their local college. Andrew's family had fought for local provision at considerable personal cost including the loss of potential employment opportunities for his mother, pressure on the family, lack of attention to his siblings. Andrew's move to college also caused considerable emotional upset.

Chris originally attended an out-of-county residential school which had resulted in a high emotional cost through being away from family and friends. Chris was not offered any other options for his education in his home county. When his parents heard about In Control they applied immediately and were assessed by social services. Table 3 compares the cost of the Chris's two support packages.

**Table 3 Comparison of packages (Hurstfield et al 2007).**

Chris –out-of-county placement		Chris – In Control package	
out-of-county placement	£60 000 per year	College course – 4 days per week	£15 723 college course (paid by LSC)

Social services costs	£15, 723 social services cost	Transport to college	£10, 957 pa
Respite care	Cost not provided	Voluntary work (1 day per week)	£9,587
		Total – education/volunteering	<b>£36, 267</b>
		Social services allowances (In Control)	£15, 340
		Independent Living Fund and benefits	£28, 690
<b>Combined costs</b>	<b>£79, 918</b>	<b>Combined costs</b>	<b>£80, 297</b>

The cost of the personalised college course at a local further education college was £23,733 cheaper than the out-of-county placement. The total costs of the two packages was comparable at around £80,000 per year. The In Control package also provided flexibility regarding how the money was spent and enabled Chris to be included in the local college and local voluntary work and remain at home with his family and supportive friends. This enabled him to be included in and contribute to his local community.

Similarly, recent studies regarding the costs and benefits of supported employment show a wide range in benefits for those who gain employment, such as meeting some of their aspirations through work achievements, wider relationships and improved income, as well a final saving for the tax payer. Beyer's (2007) evaluation of the outcomes of supported employment in North Lanarkshire found using a financial cost benefit analysis that:

'Taking into account reduction in Welfare Benefit payments when in work, tax and NI receipts, the costs of sustaining disabled people if NLSE [North Lanarkshire Supported Employment] did not exist, and the cost of displaced non-disabled workers estimated that the cost to government for NLSE to be -£6,894 (a saving).' (page 3)

This service was supporting disabled people to work more than 16 hours per week. The report also found that the:

'Cost per job was £7,216 pp pa based on an average of 122 people in work in 2007. The equivalent cost per person based on "actual capacity" for Locality Support Services was £14,998 pp pa.' (page 2)

Similarly, Kilsby and Beyer's (2010) Financial Cost Benefit Analysis of Kent Supported Employment (KSE) found that:

'From the taxpayer perspective KSE has a net saving of £3,564 per person per year compared to a day service alternative.' (second page of executive summary)

This service was not supporting many workers in employment of 16 or more hours per week.

## **Section 4**

The final section of this report:

- Summarises the themes which emerged from the case studies of the eight young people (which included their parents' views, interviews with a professional who had been involved with them during transition) and the views of the expert professionals who discussed the issues raised.
- Places the 'findings' in the context of the literature (also discussed in Section 1).
- Presents the Suffolk specific recommendations for improved practice. These recommendations were provided by key professionals in Suffolk and accord with the general recommendations for transition support for young people with special educational needs and young disabled people.

### **4.1 Summary of the themes from the research**

The themes from the research are presented under 4 sub headings:

- The concept of transition.
- Support during transition.
- Transition planning.
- Outcomes for young people involved in this research.

#### **The concept of transition and young people's aspirations**

- The term 'transition' was viewed theoretically as a holistic concept – ie moving on from school to adult life. However, discussions about, and planning for, transition focused on day time activities, initially the move from school to college.
- All of the young people aspired to have lives similar to their peers. They wanted to have a job, friends and those who were living at home wanted to move out one day. Vocational training was clearly desired as well as a job that used their skills.
- All of the young people had gone to a local college after leaving school, whether they had left local mainstream or special school or had returned from residential school or college.
- The expert professionals noted that employment was not considered a realistic option for the majority of young people unless they were really 'work ready'. The support that would be required to attain this was not available.
- Parents and some professionals believed that transition should be an ongoing activity until the young people were in their late twenties and that many young people had a poor transition.

#### **Support during transition**

- Schools were praised for the effort made in ensuring transition from school to college was successful.
- Professionals had no experience of receiving a person centred plan from an out-of-county school and professionals were criticised for not attending out-of-county reviews.

- Professionals believed that planning for return from residential school/college should start earlier but would be hampered by the distance and lack of time.
- While the young people liked the social aspect of college, some of the young people and their parents criticised a 'one-size fits all' approach which did not challenge the more academically able young people or develop vocational skills.
- Two young people had had an Improving Choices bespoke learning programme. This support was viewed positively enabling young people to follow their interests and develop skills. One package of support had taken along time to organise leaving the young person 'to flounder' with no day time activity.
- Although two of the young people had returned to Suffolk after attending out-of-county residential school/college, this was considered rare by the expert professionals. It was considered more usual for young people to remain out-of-county.
- Connexions workers played a key role in advising and supporting young people. Individual Connexions workers were praised but support was inhibited by large caseloads, having no budget to provide services and being 'geographically based' rather than allocated to young people on a long-term basis.
- Adult and Community services were described as really 'overstretched' and focused on crisis work and therefore unable to be involved in positive early transition planning. Parents were aware that those 'who shout loudest get most' and that support would only be provided in a crisis.

## **Transition planning**

- All of the young people were invited to all or some of their 14 plus review.
- When leaving college, support was offered by Connexions workers.
- Only one young person had a Person Centred Plan (PCP). There was no importance placed by professionals on having a PCP. PCPs were often context specific and not felt to impact greatly on service planning. Professionals considered person centred plans a similar to the support plan which would be developed when a young person received an individual budget.
- Parents fought for support of their young person. Parents felt unsupported in the transition process.
- There had been clear planning for their future of the 'looked after' young person. Their current support was monitored through annual reviews of his pathway plan.
- Personal budgets were promoted to eligible young people and their families. The amount offered was often 'moderated' to be as cost effective as possible. Personal budgets were seen to reduce costs for Adult and Community services.
- Circles of support were regarded as helpful to families, making use of friendships and community resources. Professionals were not encouraged to participate in circles of support.
- The Transition team was recognised as developing appropriate, well thought out transition plans.

## Outcomes for the young people involved in this research

- Only one of the young people had a job. The young person who had a job only worked two sessions a week and wanted to move on. The job had come out of his of bespoke learning programme.
- 7 of the young people filled their week with leisure like activities which kept them safe, often at the expense of learning 'softer skills' such as money and interpersonal skills. There was a range of support provided from very little to 2:1 support 5 days a week. Some of the young people did voluntary work.
- The young person who had attended mainstream school had not continued to be included in mainstream activities.
- The young people's views of their lives ranged from happy to bored and lonely. It was recognised that the social skills and relationship building aspects of the young people's lives had been neglected in transition planning and any subsequent support provided.
- Only two of the young people had moved out of their family home. A third young person, who had been looked after, had 24 hour support in his own home. The rest of the young people expressed a desire to live away from home in the future.
- Section 3 detailed the large amount of financial support provided to young people during their post-16 education which led to the all but one of the young people remaining without employment and not contributing to society. Some of these cost were:

Education/support provided	Cost
Improving Choices package (2.5 years)	£107 082 (total cost)
Out-of-County school and college (5 years)	£269 890 (total cost)
25 hour per week one-to-one support for activities and maintaining a tenancy (2008 prices)	£16 900 per year
35 hours per week of two-to-one support (2009 prices)	£48 230 per year

The issues in Suffolk's transitions processes can be summarised as:

- An inability to respond to young people's aspirations and support them to enter employment and to have a life like their peers.
- A lack of options for young people.
- A lack of planning and support.
- A need for earlier and ongoing planning and review by consistent worker/co-ordinator.
- A need for ongoing support until young people are in their late twenties.

Unfortunately, the themes clearly reflect the wider literature and show that Suffolk is facing the same difficult issues as other local authorities (Morris, 1999; O'Sullivan, 2000; Heslop et al, 2002; Tarleton, 2004; Hudson, 2006; Gitsham et al, 2011; Sloper et al, 2010). Professionals in Suffolk and

the Parent Carer's Network were aware of these issues and suggested ways to move forward. Rogers (2010) for Suffolk Parent Carer Network highlighted:

- The need for commitment to make transition work especially across Children and Young People's Services, Adult and Community services and Health including sign up from Directors, transition being under one lead with transition champions in CYP, ACS and Health.
- The transition board to have ability to 'sign off' on all transition services.
- PCP should be central to the whole process. There should be a designated person to action the plan and ensure that it is a live document. The plan should be reviewed at critical times and services should have the capacity to implement the support planned.
- Person centred transition plans should be used by all services to stop duplication and provide information regarding services and how to access them.
- Person centred plans should be available to everyone who wants one.
- Young people should be able to access transition service at any point up to 25. This access should be easy and flexible.

Future work on transition in Suffolk should follow all of the recent good practice guidance in order to work toward outcomes which young people and their families are proud of and which provide better value for money (Department of Health 2008; Gitsham et al 2011; Ofsted 2011; Sayce Review 2011; Transplan undated). The Suffolk Transition Pathway (2012) which includes all of the recent guidance has already been developed. This Pathway should be followed by professionals in Suffolk. It is available on the Suffolk County Council website and a programme of briefings and workforce development activities will be announced in the near future.

Gitsham et al (2011) and Heslop et al (2007) summarise the strategies that can lead to a positive transition journey and suggest ways in which these could be implemented. These strategies resonate with recommendations from professionals in Suffolk (see below). Gitsham et al (2011) suggests that organisations should show strong leadership to ensure holistic multi-agency working that focuses on positive outcomes. They suggest the following strategies:

- Expect more and aim higher.
- Embed person-centred transition reviews and plans within schools and colleges.
- Develop a personalised curriculum and provide meaningful work experience for young people with learning disabilities.
- Invest in personal and individualised budgets for young people.
- Develop the market to offer a wide range of post-16 options that lead to equal life outcomes, including employment.
- Work Together for Change: Learn together about what works and what gets in the way.

Heslop et al (2007) provided five C's which facilitate a positive transition process:

- Communication: which is open, honest and respectful between agencies and between agencies and families; independent advocacy for young people.
- Co-ordination: effective interagency working, joint training initiative, joint assessment procedures and a cohesive strategic approach to service provision.

- Comprehensiveness: an effective transition plan for all young people; appropriate ethnicity and disability equality training for all staff; expectation that young people with learning difficulties will have access to the same opportunities to realise their aspirations as their peers.
- Continuity: key workers to support individual young people and their families throughout the transition process; a seamless transition from Children's to Adult services; a range of options for young people to move into and between.
- Choice: more and better involvement of young people and their families in the transition process; access to appropriate information on potential options; development of a range of local post-school alternatives in housing and employment (page 5 of summary of the findings: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry/research/completed-projects/bridging-findings.pdf>)

In order to embed this approach to transition, systemic change is required. Suffolk County Council would be advised to personalise transition services, using the guidance from Scown and Sanderson (2010):

'What it takes is a combination of energy and commitment; learning and adapting; and using stories about real people to anchor your organisation in reality. It's also about developing a planning process that appreciates the complexity of change; actively involving the organisation's leaders from across all parts of the business; and communicating early, clearly and graphically.

Finally, it's about doing and reviewing it. Across all parts of the business: from finance to quality, marketing to human resources.' (page 2)

## **4.2 Recommendations following consultation on the findings chapter**

The following recommendations are presented under 10 headings:

- Expectations and Aspirations.
- Training about transition.
- Information.
- Person centred planning/transition planning.
- Personalisation and personal budgets.
- Strategic planning, service design and delivery.
- College course.
- Voluntary work/work placements.
- Housing.
- Out-of-county Placements.

These recommendations were provided by professionals with a detailed understanding of transition in Suffolk in response to Section 2.

## **Expectations and Aspirations**

- Ensure professionals have aspirations for young people particularly in relation to becoming part of the workforce and the skills in order to support young people to access employment.
- Challenge the idea that 'raising aspirations raises cost' (see Section 3 for further detail of the reduced longer term cost of supporting young people's independence).
- Ensure workers understand the benefits of the personalisation agenda and desire to empower young people, and their families.

## **Training about transition**

- Young people and their parents should be involved in providing training regarding transition and transition planning.
- Training should challenge any negative attitudes regarding the ability of young people with special educational needs to contribute to society and encourage workers to have higher aspirations for young people and to personalise the planning and support for young people with special educational needs.

## **Information**

- Up-to-date and relevant information should be available to parents, young people and their supporters regarding the range of services/support organisations in Suffolk. This information should be in written formats, available on the net and provided through events. Young people and their parents should be involved in the design of publications.
- Clear information regarding Benefits and EMA when attending college should be available.

## **Person centred planning/transition planning**

Transition plans should be:

- Owned by the young person and the young person should have the opportunity to contribute to the initial document and to review/refocus the document as their life develops.
- 'Portable'- ie they should be used and valued by all services and agencies involved (so that assessments are not repeated).
- Holistic focusing on all aspects of the young person's life including friendships, relationships, housing and work.
- Initiated early and become 'living documents' that are regularly monitored and reviewed.
- Clearly focussed with a definite 'destination' and outline the steps necessary to reach the 'destination'.
- Used for planning.
- Developed for young people returning from out-of-county placements.

In addition:

- If a young person is eligible for support from Adult services, a social worker should attend transition planning meetings and ensure that young people are 'in the system' at the start of the planning process.



- Young people who are leaving their further education or learning programmes should be offered support to help them focus on what is next and to access systems/agencies that will help them move forward. Futures Unlimited is currently piloting a project which tracks young people who are leaving college. Future Unlimited is collecting detailed information about the young person and sharing this with Adult services, if appropriate, and/or signposting young people to other organisations/agencies.

## **Personalisation and Personal budgets**

- More use should be made of personal budgets to enable young people and their families to control the support provided. Information should be provided about personal budgets and parents supported to work together to develop and share skills regarding utilising personal budgets. Suffolk was involved in the Better Lives project( 2010-2011) which enabled young people and their families to learn about personalisation, develop a support plan and to individualise their services  
([http://www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/Families\\_Personalisation\\_project\\_note\\_for\\_carers\\_d  
ay, Dec11.pdf](http://www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/Families_Personalisation_project_note_for_carers_day_Dec11.pdf)). The full report, published soon, should be considered both in relation to the way families often view personalisation (as a cut in services) and with regard to how families can be supported to work with professionals to personalise services and utilise a personal budget.
- Circles of support should be promoted to groups of parents, young people and other professionals.

## **Strategic planning, service design and delivery**

- Young people and their parents should be involved in service design, particularly for age appropriate creative opportunities to learn informally and to develop social skills and relationships.
- Transition champions are required in Adult and Community services social work teams to ensure workers are up-to-date on relevant policy and local initiatives. Senior managers should also recognise the importance of transition planning.
- Adults' and Children's services need to engage more closely at local level to discuss and transfer case information earlier and to avoid breaks/delays in support.
- There should be strategic ownership of Transitions work and processes across CYPS and ACS. Governance and direction should be provided.
- Robust information should be collected to inform future transition planning.

## **Transfer to college/other support packages**

- Applications for college/Improving Choices programme should be made in the autumn and decisions made by February in readiness for the following September.
- Funding should be available for taster days at the new provision.
- Planning should start early and involve all of the relevant parties. Professionals should use the timeline provided in the 'Suffolk Transition Pathway' (2012).

## College courses

- Individualised courses should be available, particularly for students wanting to follow a particular vocational route but who do not have the appropriate grades to access standard courses.
- Support should be provided for more able students to access standard vocational courses.
- Consideration should be given to developing a Project SEARCH in Suffolk (<http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/odi-projects/jobs-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/project-search.php>). The Project Search model helps disabled people secure and keep paid permanent jobs. It is particularly suited to people with moderate and severe learning disabilities or autism, and others who can benefit from partnership working. A college tutor or school teacher and job coach run a year-long programme of work training for 12 people via a series of work placements in a host employer organisation. The cross-government Valuing Employment Now team, based in the Department of Health, has developed a range of resources to support local and regional delivery of Project Search.

## Voluntary work/work placements

- Voluntary work/supported work placements should be available to students while at college and on leaving college. The Realistic Opportunities for Supported Employment (ROSE) project at Havering College should be used as a model of good practice (<http://rose.havering-college.ac.uk/>). This programme aims to secure paid work placements for clients with learning disabilities.
- Widen the role of the Education Business Partnership to include young people with higher needs.
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to build local network and raise awareness of the need for opportunities for young people with special educational needs and to provide job coaches and 'on-the-job' training.

## Housing

- Routes to home ownership for young adults with special educational needs should be investigated and clear information provided.

## Out-of-county Placements

- Review the content of out-of-county placement contracts to ensure that there is a presumption is that the young person will return to Suffolk and that the provider will participate in transitional planning to facilitate this move.

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